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## **Digital Learning Advisory Council**

### Meeting Minutes

July 26, 2022

### **Attendees**

- Doug Casey — Connecticut Commission for Educational Technology
- Jonathan Costa — EdAdvance
- Andy DePalma — EASTCONN
- Josh Elliott — Fairfield University
- Barbara Johnson — Colchester Public Schools
- Laura McCaffrey — Archdiocese of Hartford
- Greg McVerry — Southern Connecticut State University
- Jim Mindek — Connecticut Technical High Schools
- Josh Smith — Region 15 Public Schools
- Chinma Uche — CREC Aerospace Academy & CT CS Teachers Association
- Scott Zak — Connecticut State Colleges and Universities

### **Agenda**

- Commission Resolution
- Federal Digital Equity Funding
- Digital Government Summit

### **Welcome**

Commission executive director Doug Casey welcomed members of the Advisory Council on behalf of Nick Caruso, the group's chair, who could not attend the meeting.

### **Commission Resolution**

Doug opened the meeting by providing some brief context around the first topic. The Digital Learning Advisory Council in 2021 sought to identify effective practices to support learning through the use of technology. The group invited members of the education community to respond to a simple prompt — "What about technology use during the pandemic is worth keeping as we return to in-person education?" — through the Thought Exchange platform, generously hosted by Jonathan Costa of EdAdvance.

The limited responses to and takeaways from that survey (see [June 2021 report](#)) did not introduce any dramatically new ideas. Nonetheless, the Advisory Council members felt strongly that the Commission should underscore the value of using digital tools and pedagogies to support learning. Out of those sentiments came a draft and final



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resolution that the Commission adopted at its [June 6, 2022 meeting](#). With this summary of progress to date, Doug welcomed members to suggest possible next steps for the Commission, including how and with whom to share the resolution in order to put its action statements into practice.

Jonathan Costa suggested the use of the resolution to help with the design of the forthcoming five-year strategic plan of the State Board of Education (SBE). He offered to share the resolution and specific actions that the SBE could take at a planning meeting he will facilitate in October. He also strongly encouraged sharing the resolution and any specific legislative and funding recommendations with the Connecticut General Assembly's [Education Committee](#). More broadly, he encouraged the development of guidelines or a "filter" for all proposed legislation to ensure that it directly supports an enlightened vision of high school graduates. Doing so might lead to bills that address longer term goals rather than legislation passed hurriedly in the closing hours of the session that often speaks to narrow or short-term objectives.

Doug welcomed these suggestions and any other ideas that the Advisory Council members would have to address both proposed, new legislation as well as the removal of legal mandates in the education system that serve as barriers to advancing personalized learning through technology.

To this point, Josh Smith referred to a significant number of new mandates on the Connecticut State Department of Education (CSDE) and local school districts that came out of the 2022 legislative session. These requirements, all well intentioned, can still vie against local schools' ability to provide the training and other supports needed for effective use of technology in teaching and learning. The new mandates also come at a time when the State, philanthropies, and districts have made unprecedented investments in student devices and software, often with no sustainability plan. Scott Zak suggested that the Commission might pursue funding to support grant-writing services for schools and libraries to address the sustainability of technology.

Andy DePalma welcomed the resolution's takeaways but noted that the document does not specifically name responsible entities. Many of the schools he serves still struggle to find funding for teacher training, information technology support, and other essential resources to ensure the effective use of technology in teaching and learning.

To engage all education stakeholders beyond just the K – 12 community, Greg McVerry encouraged tying the resolution and its implications to address the challenge of workforce shortages. He noted the support coming from the Governor's office and other State agencies and partners toward the goal of preparing students for the jobs of today and tomorrow and suggested tying high school courses to the [North American Industry Classification System \(NAICS\) codes](#). Citing digital learning investments as a key to advancing this workforce agenda may help enlist support and action among state leaders. Such calls to action would also carry weight if they came from constituents,



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employers, and organizations such as CCAT and ReadyCT, who see a direct need for digital, technical, and higher-level thinking skills among the candidates they are hiring.

Jim Mindek cited the Technical High School System's work with the Connecticut Department of Labor to align course design and selection with internship placements and long-term employment opportunities for students. Andy continued this thread of workforce preparation, stating that full knowledge of the landscape of career decisions and empowering students to make those decisions remains a matter of equity.

One specific recommendation from Jonathan would be to look at rewriting the teacher certification regulations, last updated in 1997. This session's [PA 22-80](#) addresses the currency of teacher certification by requiring the CSDE to review and identify obsolete provisions to the statute. The Commission's resolution can inform this work.

Doug welcomed all of these suggestions and encouraged further recommendations through an editable planning document where Advisory Council members could note the challenges and potential approaches to support effective learning. These ideas would help make the resolution more actionable and inform the development of the Commission's next strategic plan.

### **Federal Digital Equity Funding**

Doug welcomed Advisory Council input on the preliminary plans of the Commission in support of the federal Digital Equity programs. He offered a brief overview of this program, part of the Infrastructure Investment and Jobs Act (IIJA) with oversight through the US Department of Commerce's National Telecommunications and Information Administration (NTIA, [broadbandusa.ntia.doc.gov/digital-equity-programs](https://broadbandusa.ntia.doc.gov/digital-equity-programs)). The program includes formula-based awards to participating states for planning (first phase) and capacity building (second phase). Doug shared that the Commission is leading this work and has submitted Connecticut's application to receive funding for the planning phase, with an expected funding award in September.

Development of the State's digital equity plan will take place over the course of one year and include intentional outreach to and collection of input from communities across Connecticut, with a specific focus on identifying the needs of "covered populations" such as those at lower income levels, residents with disabilities or experiencing homelessness, and households with school-aged children, among others. Planning funds will support research into the gaps that exist in Connecticut around broadband availability, affordability, and adoption, as well as the development of skills to use technology effectively for learning, career advancement, and civic engagement. Based on these inputs, the Commission will develop and execute a statewide digital equity plan that would begin in 2023 and be funded through 2028. He underscored the close coordination of digital equity efforts with the buildout of



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broadband to residents, funded through the complementary [Broadband Equity, Access, and Deployment](#) (BEAD) and [Middle Mile](#) programs.

Chinma Uche welcomed the initiative as a means of addressing the needs of adult learners around affordable Internet access and skill development. She also saw this work as a means of connecting the K – 12 and adult education communities. Doug also shared that the Commission will likely work with other agencies to convene a fall 2022 event that collects stakeholder input that helps with the design of the State's digital equity plan and programs.

### **Digital Government Summit**

On September 8, the Department of Administrative Services will host its sixth annual Digital Government Summit. Doug welcomed the members of the Advisory Council and their professional networks to attend this free event, designed for those in the public sector to share challenges and solutions to serving residents in the digital age. The event will include an overview of the forthcoming "MyCT," a personalized site designed to meet the needs of individual residents. Other sessions will address data privacy, cloud computing, and cybersecurity. Greg welcomed the invitation and cited the need for stronger cybersecurity resources to protect students, educators, and institutions. He also expressed a need for channels to discuss challenges and best practices in technology through some form of online professional learning community. Registration for the free event remains open at [events.govtech.com/Connecticut-Digital-Government-Summit.html](https://events.govtech.com/Connecticut-Digital-Government-Summit.html).

### **Adjournment**

Doug thanked the members for their insights and time, calling the meeting to a close at 2:20 PM.